

# critical digest

Vol. III No. 15

December 11, 1950

The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

## New York Openings This Week

The Cellar and the Well-ANTA Playhouse, 12/10/50. George Freedley and R.L. Stevens present second in ANTA subscription series. Performances at 5:30 P.M. Dorothy Sands and Eda Heinemann featured in play by Phillip Fruneseu...Let's Make an Opera-Golden, 12/13/50. Show of the Month Club's production of English audience-participation musical with score by Benjamin Britten and book by Eric Grozier. Norman Del Mar leads the cast and the audience...Bless You All-Hellinger, 12/14/50. Levin and Smith musical comedy starring Jules Munshin, Mary McCarty, Pearl Bailey and Valerie Bettis; music and lyrics by Harold Rome; sketches by Arnold Auerbach.

## Digests of Current Reviews -- more on back page

Guys and Dolls-46th St. Theatre, 11/24/50. Musical version of Runyon stories produced by Feuer and Martin continues to win top adjectives. Five weekly critics have joined bandwagon, though Marshall, Nation, admits she was disappointed. The musical comedy didn't live up to the promise shown in the opening scene. Gibbs, New Yorker, considered show the musical he had the most fun at in years. Time critic felt it could be considered a model if love story had not been taken too seriously. Large cast headed by Vivian Blaine and Robert Alda shared in applause. Francis, Billboard, picked Isabel Bigley as a coming ingenue.

Ring Round the Moon-Martin Beck, 11/23/50. Christopher Fry's translation of Jean Anouilh's "charade with music" continues to draw mixed reviews from weekly appraisers. Gabriel, Cue, had expected to find the most delightful evening of the season, but cast didn't do its part. Time critic thought script was just too talky. Critics of Billboard, Variety, New Yorker and Newsweek enjoyed witty lines and fine acting by Lucile Watson and rest of cast. Marshall, Nation, considered Denhold Elliott star of evening in twin role.

The Relapse-Morosco, 11/22/50. Three cons and three pros filed by magazine critics on Theatre Guild revival of John Vanbrugh's 17th century farce. Though Cyril Ritchard and Madge Elliott won raves from most, reviewers of Cue, Nation and New Yorker didn't think pair enough to overcome museum script. But the judges on Newsweek, Billboard and Variety recommended the production for special audiences. They found script very topical and the Ritchards performances delightful. Variety critic was sorry supporting performances weren't as good as the stars.

## Editorial Pros & Cons

Certainly Robert Sherwood was kidding when he wished aloud that the Council of the Living Theatre will make "National Theatre Week" as vital as National Apple Week. National Anything Week is only important to its promoters and a group of assorted press agents. Already 151 special weeks have been named in 1951. The Council of the Living Theatre's major aim is to promote theatre on a national basis, not to encourage the status quo of Broadway. Sawyer Falk's letter in Times Drama Mailbag aptly made this point. It would be a pity if the first steps in the right direction were turned to personal interests.

## News & Notes

Shows that closed include Edwina Black...Bill Doll set up an "Out of Town Press Room" for visiting drama editors at his ANTA Theatre office...John McClain, Journal American, to edit "Carnival" quarterly...Billy Rose dropped syndicated column, claiming overwork...Sidney Fields, Mirror, will start a WOR interview program...Wolcott Gibbs, New Yorker, draws \$1900 weekly as author of Season in the Sun.

' A Key to NYC Criticism At A Glance '

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them, not if they think they will be hits. "So-So" means the critic did not state directly if he recommended the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening.

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|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. NY Times                       | 11. Newark News         | 21. Catholic World  |
| 2. NY Herald Tribune              | 12. Women's Wear Daily  | 22. Commonweal      |
| 3. NY News                        | 13. Daily Worker        | 23. Cue             |
| 4. NY Mirror                      | 14. Wall Street Journal | 24. Chr.Sci.Monitor |
| 5. NY Compass                     | 15. Journal of Commerce | 25. Sat.Review Lit. |
| 6. NY Post                        | 16. George Jean Nathan  | 26. Newsweek        |
| 7. Ward Morehouse (WT&S, N.Y.Sun) | 17. Morning Telegraph   | 27. Time            |
| 8. NY Journal American            | 18. Variety             | 28. Nation          |
| 9. World Telegram & Sun           | 19. Billboard           | 29. New Republic    |
| 10. Brooklyn Eagle                | 20. Theatre Arts        | 30. New Yorker      |

Affairs of State-Music Box, 9/25/50. Pro: 11 votes. Con: 1-6-7-10-11-12-14-16-20-22-24-25-26-29.

Arms and the Man-Arena, 10/26/50. Pro: 4-10-11-12-18-19-23-29. Con: 1-2-3-5-6-7-8-9-14-15-16-26.

Bell, Book & Candle-Barrymore, 11/14/50. Pro: 1-3-4-5-8-9-10-11-12-14-15-16-19-23-26-27-28-30. Con: 2-6-7-18-22.

Black Chiffon-48th St.Theatre, 9/27/50. Pro: 20 votes. Con: 2-3-14-22-27-29.

Call Me Madame-Imperial, 10/12/50. Pro: 22 votes. Con: 19-28-29. So-So: 3.

The Cocktail Party-Miller, 1/2/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 1-9-13-14-22-25-29. So-So: 16-30.

The Country Girl-Lyceum, 11/10/50. Pro: 1-2-3-5-6-7-8-10-11-12-14-15-19-22-23-24-26. Con: 4-9-16-27-28-30.

Edwina Black-Booth, 11/21/50. Pro: 3-6-8-12. Con: 1-2-4-5-7-9-10. So-So: 11.

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes-Ziegfeld, 12/8/49. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 6-21-28. So-So: 16-19-22-23-27.

The Golden State-Fulton, 11/25/50. Con: 1-2-3-4-5-6-8-9-10-11-12.

Guys and Dolls-46th St.Theatre, 11/24/50. Pro: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-16.

The Happy Time-Plymouth, 1/24/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 5-6-7-20-26-27-28-30.

Hilda Crane-Coronet, 11/1/50. Pro: 3-4-6-8-9-10-11-12-15-18-22-24-26. Con: 1-2-5-14-16-19-23-27-28-29-30.

Kiss Me Kate-Shubert, 12/31/48. Pro: 28 votes. Con: 29.

The Lady's Not For Burning-Royale, 11/5/50. Pro: 20 votes. Con: 3-5-12-29. So-So: 18-30.

The Member of the Wedding-Empire, 1/5/50. Pro: 26 votes. Con: 16. So-So: 2-27-30.

Mister Roberts-Alvin, 2/13/48. Pro: 24 votes. Con: 21-24. So-So: 13-16-17.

Pardon Our French-Broadway, 10/5/50. Pro: 10-11-12-15-18. Con: 2-3-4-6-7-14-16-19-21-23-26-27-30. So-So: 1-5-8-9.

Peep Show-Winter Garden, 6/28/50. Pro: 11 votes. Con: 1-2-12-16-20-26-27-28-29-30. So-So: 3-14-18.

Peter Pan- St. James, 4/24/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 8-13-16-30. So-So: 6-7-14-19.

Ring Round the Moon-Martin Beck, 11/23/50. Pro: 4-5-6-7-10-12-16. Con: 3-8-9. So-So: 1-2.

The Relapse-Morosco, 11/22/50. Pro: 2-3-6-8-9-10-12-16. Con: 1-4-7.

Season in the Sun-Cort, 9/28/50. Pro: 20 votes. Con: 10-12-24-28. So-So: 11.

South Pacific-Majestic, 4/8/49. Pro: 19 votes. Con: 27. So-So: 23.

The Tower Beyond Tragedy-ANTA Playhouse, 11/26/50. Pro: 1-3-11-12. Con: 2-4-5-6-8-10.

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' Green Room Department '  
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CRITICS AT WORK...Those who envy the soft life of a drama critic can now start wishing they could be TV critics. O'brian, Journal American, is convinced the relaxed home working hours of a TV critic beats the drama job. Former AP drama critic turned TV critic enjoys the broadcasts in any costume and he can have snacks all evening. He also avoids the silly questions of the first nighters, though the working hours are longer.

PROPOSED SLOGAN..."Let's Go To A Show" was submitted by Chapman, News, as a working slogan for the Council of the Living Theatre promotion campaign. This was suggested as a substitute for the planned "The Play's the Thing". Major trouble of theatre is that public now doesn't go to "shows", they only go to hits. Actually nobody ever got fatally ill from going to a show.

OUT OF TOWN CRITICS...Frank Fay blasted the San Francisco critics during the performance of If You Please for unanimously panning his show. He charged that they couldn't write a review unless they had the N.Y. criticisms to copy...Harris, Philadelphia Bulletin, explained why the hits in New York were panned in Philadelphia during their tryouts. The shows seen in his town are only tryouts expressly meant for mending and bear little relation to the finished production.

5:30 P.M. CURTAIN...Early curtain time of ANTA's The Cellar and the Well doesn't meet with favor of Watts, Post, and Francis, Billboard. Latter wonders how many subscribers can keep bankers' hours.

PICKING THE HITS...Coleman, Mirror, advised readers to buy tickets for six shows before they opened, and all six have been hits. This service is done in Coleman's role of drama reporter. Seasoned scouts send in reports on the out-of-town tryouts before he recommends them.

BROADWAY IS DEAD...Though columnists may label their items "Broadway" they really know there isn't any such place any more, insists Lait, Mirror. When the Mirror editor was a trade paper reporter he knew more entertainers by their first names than there are people in the business today. "The exprit of a sui generis" world within a world has evaporated.

SHADES OF SHAW...The Member of the Wedding is equally persuasive on a second viewing, comments Sheaffer, Eagle. Reason is fine acting by Ethel Waters, Julie Harris and Brandon de Wilde, plus compassionate script by Garson McCullers.

VARIETY RATINGS...Atkinson, Times, wrote more unfavorable reviews this season than any of the other daily critics, according to figures in Variety. Trade paper's figures again prove that critics liked more shows than public supported. These didn't consider if critics choices were right or wrong. Figures for eight daily critics show they wrote 42 per cent favorable reviews.

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' Theatre News Rounq Up '  
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Showtime, USA renewed for a second cycle on 48 ABC-TV stations...Voice of the Turtle has earned 3000 per cent profit...The International Set, by Time critic, Louis Kronenberger may be produced by Theatre Guild...AP women editors named Ethel Merman as "Theatre Woman of the Year"...Elmer Rice in 1928 reserved TV rights on Street Scene...Decca recorded Guys and Dolls album in one day...CBS planning afternoon program featuring Rex Harrison and Lilli Palmer...Censored sections of Out Of This World taken out to please Boston censor will be restored for N.Y. opening...Clifford Odets will teach small playwrighting class at Actors Studio...ANTA held round table discussion to aid young foreign theatre students studying here...Short on CBS neighbors being readied...Musicians Union classified The Relapse and Ring Round the Moon as musicals...WNBC Henry Morgan dropped, Gilbert Seldes filled in for week with records of famous plays...Tallulah Bankhead current activities include discing of two Dorothy Parker sketches, and singing to Joe Buskin's music at Columbia University dance.



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' Interview Hi-Lights '  
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BUTCH CAVELL...Eleven year old veteran of six stage plays and hundreds of TV and radio shows detailed his future plans on MBS Sardis. He wants to play baseball professionally when he grows up. He especially would like to join the N.Y. Yankees when he is about 20. If this doesn't work out he will settle for the job of secret service man. And if neither materializes he then will return to the theatre as a vocation.

LEONARD STRAUSS...Business manager for entertainers helps actors spend their paychecks more intelligently, Hawkins, WT&S discovered. So far Strauss has never had a failure; he helps find definite objects for which his clients save. Much of his work is along the lines of practical psychology. Clients include John Gielgud, Adolph Green, Carol Goodner, Bibi Osterwald and Valerie Bettis.

GEORGE FREDLEY...Producer of The Cellar and the Well explained some of the joys of his job as Curator of Theatre Collection of N.Y. Public Library to WNBC Eleanor Roosevelt. Every week thousands of people call in person, while hundreds write or phone for information. Once he got an offer of a warehouse of scenery but he had no place to put it.

FRANK LOESSER...Guys and Dolls composer's telephone has led hectic life since author's show turned into Broadway hit, Rice, Post, reveals. With a phone in every room, Mr. and Mrs. are kept busy 24 hours a day. Callers are in search of tickets, song pluggers, music publishers and invitations to dinner. They answer all calls because they don't want to be considered snobs.

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' Digests of Current Reviews '  
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The Golden State-Fulton, 11/25/50. Weekly reviewers professing high admiration for Josephine Hull still could find little to enjoy in Samuel Spewack's comedy. Newsweek critic alone thought Miss Hull's performance was enough to overcome limited theatrical circumstances. Gibbs, New Yorker, ranked script as tie with A Story For A Sunday Evening as the dullest of the season.

The Country Girl-Lyceum, 11/10/50. Clifford Odets new play about life backstage won two more "pro" reviews from weekly critics, but for widely diverse reasons. Brown, SRL, joined his colleagues in welcoming Odets back to the theatre for writing a play without a social chip on his shoulder. Critic thinks current play starring Paul Kelly and Uta Hagen is equal to Odets' first efforts. But Clurman, New Republic, who was a director of Group Theater when Odets' first plays were produced, isn't as happy. This is lightweight Odets, thin in characterization, meager in authentic feeling, shallow in invention. It is a commentary on the press, rather than on the playwright, writes Clurman, that the least meaty of Odets plays proves the most popular.

Edwina Black-Booth, 11/21/50. English mystery script by Dimmer and Mormum could stand good dose of John Dickson Carr and a less self-conscious audience, comments Kerr, Commonweal. Filing it away as merely the latest example of the meticulous and plodding thriller, the critic recalls the completely unrealistic, but thrilling, mystery plays he saw in stock.

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' Legit Stuff '  
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Show of the Month Club ordered to halt tie-in sales of tickets to subscribers... Jack Shanley, Times, taking two week vacation, he became father of twins last week... Helen Hayes received Veteran Administration citation for American Theatre Wing... West Coast Catholic newspaper is attacking film "Born Yesterday" as a Marxist satire... Miss Liberty will be telecast January 8th on NBC TV... Viking published The Golden State.

